THE KINDERGARTEN

THE work of Frederich Froebel was put back to a degree that no man can compute, through the coldness, indifference and actual opposition of men who should have stood by him and upheld him. ¶ The kindergarten is a complete reversal of barbaric educational schemes that did not spare the rod ❧ We started in with the assumption that the child was born in sin, and "in iniquity did my mother conceive me," a slander on the children and a libel on motherhood.

But so grounded were we in error that in our teaching of children, the elements of fear, suppression and punishment were ever present. We used the studies as a club and if a child did wrong we doubled his lessons. The plan of fining the delinquent forty lines of Virgil made him love Virgil, did it

not? If there were a better way of making books more distasteful than to use them as punishment I do not know it.

The ecclesiastic English boarding school barbarity yet has its defenders ☙ At the tender age of six or seven we removed the child from his parents in the name of discipline. We sought to smother parental love and strangle affection, and we nearly succeeded.

Froebel struck right at the root of error when he referred to the children as the "Little souls fresh from God." Froebel believed in the divinity of the child. Most Christians up to his time acted as if they believed that when Christ said, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," he had a rattan hidden behind him. The practice of falling upon children with rods, straps, paddles, rulers and hair brushes has been very popular, not so much possibly to benefit the child as to relieve the pressure of pent-up emotion in the

parent. Froebel's idea was that the child was a human flower, and the school should be a garden where souls could blossom in the sunshine of love.

Froebel studied the inclinations of the child and sought to move in line with nature. He utilized the tendency to play; just as we in degree use the tides of the sea and the winds that blow to turn the wheels of trade.

¶ To use these welling tides of our nature, Froebel said, "will lead us on to the Good, or if you prefer, to God."

So in his teaching the playing of games had an important part. Play, song, and happy, useful effort—all working together for a common purpose! Socrates, four hundred and fifty years before Christ, taught that courtesy, kindness and self-possession were of more importance than facts grubbed from books—that is to say, it is qualities that make a man great and not knowledge.

Aristotle followed up the same idea and in his education of Alexander, the child impulse to collect specimens was utilized, and

Aristotle and his pupils formed the world's first herbarium and the first zoological garden. ¶ Froebel led his little band of pupils out into the woods and fields and they collected flowers, plants, birds, nests, fungi, and became acquainted with the beautiful world of nature just as a matter of curiosity, pleasure and play.

To arbitrarily punish or embarrass a child Froebel considered a great sin, because to do so might be to implant in the child's mind the seeds of hate and revenge that would poison its entire life.

Froebel saw this potent fact, that unless he could impress upon the parents the righteousness of his methods, he could make little head. He said, "The teacher is the foster parent of the child for a few hours each day, and unless the home and school work together and are in harmony, my work will be in vain."

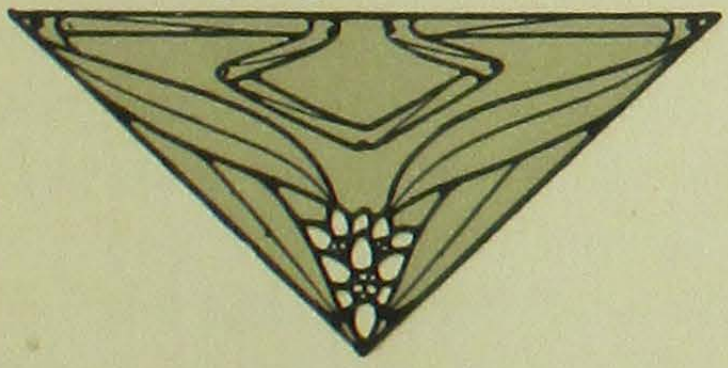
So he invited the parents to his school and also had mothers' meetings where he sought to explain the reasonableness of his work.

The theological idea at the time was that the child should be disciplined, his spirit broken, and that the dunce cap of disgrace was a good thing. Froebel sought to make his work affirmative, not negative, but in spite of his gentle diplomatic ways he met with strong opposition and constant ridicule. The only pupils he could get were those too young to go to the regular schools, and these were turned over to him because he relieved the parents of their care.

His intent and expectations were to carry his methods right up through all the grades, even into the university, and on through life. So actually, the kindergarten plan is a system of life, not merely a system of school teaching.

Froebel knew his methods were right—he never faltered in his faith. But the constant unkind criticisms of rival teachers who clung to monastic methods, the stupidity of parents and the opposition of school boards wore him out, and he died in middle life. But with his last dying breath, in broken

whisper he said to his nurse, "The world will yet accept my words—the idea of a child-garden will live! I am dying but my thought will not perish—God cannot afford to allow it to wither."

Can a person of intelligence now be found who dares say that Frederich Froebel was not a very great man—and does any one believe that Froebel did not care what people thought about him?

Is n't this true, that the greater the man, the more he desires to bless and benefit humanity, the more he actually does care what people think of him?